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AUTHOR	Gilbert, Michael B.
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ABSTRACT

Parents and educators can be described by three predominant personality types as characterized by Kahler's Process Communication Model. Children at-risk are predominantly two other types, and the adults in their lives have little energy to deal with them effectively. Two projects designed to assist the parents of children and youth having difficulty in school were funded by the Family Preservation Unit of the Arkansas Department of Children and Family Services. These projects targeted the staff and parents in the two largest school districts in the state. "Process Parenting" was developed by Taibi Kahler as a focused application of his "Process Communication Model." The model suggests six personality types--Reactors, Workaholics, Persisters, Dreamers, Rebels, and Promoters. Parents are more strongly reactors or persisters, while at-risk children are Rebels or Promoters. Communicating with Rebels and Promoters is most effective when it involves kinesthetic input through either an emotive or directive channel. For parents to become more effective, they must be able to recognize the operative failure mechanisms people project--either themselves or their children. Providing assistance by giving parents new tools to communicate more effectively enhances the child's potential for: (1) completing graduation requirements; (2) preparing for employment; and (3) reducing the possibility that future public assistance will be necessary. Process Parenting is not a panacea, only a useful tool. Parents and their children will continue to try to get their needs met. If those needs are different, effective communication is one of the ways for peace in the family to happen. (Contains nine references, and two tables and a figure of data; sample comments and data from a Process Parenting workshop are attached.) (RS)

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Are Your Kids At-Risk? Do You Listen to How They Speak to You More than Just What They Say?

Presentation at the Annual Convention
of the International Listening Association
Kansas City, MO

Michael B. Gilbert, Professor
Educational Administration and
Supervision Programs
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
2801 South University Avenue
Little Rock, AR 72204-1099

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Are Your Kids At-Risk?
Do You Listen to How They Speak to You
More than Just What They Say?

Parents and educators can be described predominantly by three personality types as characterized by Kahler's Process Communication Model. Children at-risk are predominantly two other types, and the adults in their lives have little energy to deal with them effectively. This paper will explain Kahler's model, outline the demographics of recent research, and describe alternative ways of communicating.

Introduction

Becoming a family is one of the most exciting, gratifying, and scary aspects of parenting. The reality is that few people have ever received formal preparation to be effective members of families. Those who begin their own families follow patterns they have experienced– good or bad. Children are the beneficiaries of their parents' decisions about how to parent. If the parent is effective, the child grows up well. If the parent is ineffective, the child is at-risk. Much of what determines effectiveness lies in communication– when one understands what someone else wants to be understood. When miscommunication occurs, conflict can arise, and the consequences of that conflict can be far-reaching and devastating.

Part of the communication problem is that parents presume their communication preferences are/should be shared by their children, whether those preferences are common or not. That is, parents have developed a certain communication style– benevolent, autocratic, democratic, or laissez faire– and they use that preferred style continuously, whether it works or not. William Glasser, a noted psychiatrist, author, and developer of empowering educational programs, has suggested that if what you are doing is not working, stop doing it. While advice to change non-productive patterns into productive ones is good counsel, the lack of suggestion of new techniques can be as confounding as living with the frustration of ineffective parenting. In addition, the ability to change or move to more effective patterns is difficult and uncomfortable for most people.

By strengthening families' ability to nurture their children physically, emotionally, and intellectually, family support programs increase the likelihood that children will grow up healthy, safe, and successful (Allen, 1994). If families have been torn apart by parents' inability to work

effectively with their children, reunifying the family protects children and families to the greatest extent possible (Maluccio, 1994). Former Governor Bill Clinton recognized these important principles by suggesting that investing in people– in part through family preservation– was critical to the future prosperity of Arkansas (State of Arkansas, 1989). The research reported herein focused on expanding/enhancing techniques for more effective parenting, and by doing so, reunifying or preserving the family unit.

Background

Youngsters who drop out of school or who are removed from school programs are a heavier burden on themselves and society. People without a high school diploma may be expected to have sharply reduced lifetime earnings than those who complete high school. Some estimates are as much as $200,000 over the lifetime of the worker. In addition, if the behaviors that caused removal from formal education settings are also illegal, greater burden is placed on the social system with increased intervention and care costs.

Providing assistance by giving parents new tools to communicate more effectively enhances the child's potential for **(1) completing graduation requirements, (2) preparing for employment, and (3) reducing the possibility that future public assistance will be necessary**. Two projects designed to assist the parents of children and youth having difficulty in school were funded by the Family Preservation Unit of the Arkansas Department of Children and Family Services. These projects worked with the staff and parents in the two largest school districts in the state– the Little Rock School District and the Pulaski County Special School District.

The focal group in Little Rock were those students who were truant and potential dropouts. They were identified by the Dropout Prevention Coordinator through court appearances and records. Arrangements were made through the Truancy Judge to waive monetary and other sanctions for the parents of these children, if the parents would attend a one-day workshop on **Process Parenting™**. These workshops focused on allowing parents to understand themselves better, how to connect with their children more effectively, and how to assist their children to be

motivated positively for school and life in general.

The Pulaski County project worked with Home-School Counselors, who had identified students meeting eligibility criteria: (1) scores on a national norm-referenced achievement test at or below the 25th percentile; (2) grade-point average below 2.00 (on a four-point scale); (3) sporadic attendance; and (4) disciplinary actions resulting in time out of school. Parents of these students were invited to attend a **Process Parenting™** workshop.

Staff from both districts went through a **Kahler Process Teaching Model™** workshop first to understand **Process Communication©** and how it can be applied to educational settings. Each person received a *Key to Me for Educators,* a Kahler *Personality Pattern Inventory,* a *Kahler Process Teaching Model,* and supporting audiotapes. Staff then attended a "simulated" **Process Parenting™** workshop, as if they were parents from their districts. Each person received the same personalized workshop materials as the parents would. Included in these materials were individualized personality structure, explanation of perceptual preferences, motivational needs and distress patterns, and suggestions for assisting children to get their needs met positively. Initial **Process Parenting™** workshops were facilitated by a certified **Process Communication©** trainer. Subsequent workshops were co-facilitated with district staff. Meals were provided, and incentives (transportation and child care) were offered so that parents could attend.

Fifteen staff were trained and 75 slots were available for parent participation. Parents came from all walks of life and with different levels of education– high school graduate through doctorate. Some were unhappy about "having" to attend, but all seemed to take away something useful. Workshop evaluations by parents were very positive. Some of the comments were: "I believe this will enable to work with my children in a more positive way," and "I've had a great experience in learning more about me and my family." [The composite workshop evaluations of the parents are appended.]

Process Parenting

Process Parenting™ was developed by Taibi Kahler (1996), a clinical psychologist, as

a focused application of his Process Communication Model© (PCM) (Kahler, 1982). The model suggests six personality types: *Reactors*, *Workaholics*, *Persisters*, *Dreamers*, *Rebels*, and *Promoters*. None is better or worse, more or less acceptable, more or less intelligent. Each person has a personality structure like a six-story building, where the first floor represents the foundation– strongest personality type– and where each remaining floor represents the other personality types. This generated order of personality types is set about age seven, and the ability to move to these different "floors" of our personality is measurable and predictable. Each personality type has different sets of behaviors, perceptions, and motivators that influence how people experience the world. Most people limit how they **process** reality by using the preferences from only one or two of the six available floors of their personality structure.

Unique features of the model include a questionnaire validated for purposes of determining people's personality structure, what motivates them, how they process information, and how they will behave when in distress. This aspect of predictability, also the need to measure compatibility, is why the National Aeronautic and Space Administration has used the model in the selection and training of astronauts since 1979.

An Overview of Process Parenting. The model describes the following personality types:

- **Reactors** are *warm*, *compassionate*, and *sensitive*; they experience the world through their emotions and like to please and know they are appreciated. They blossom when they feel accepted and appreciated as a person. (30 percent of the North-American population; mainly female, 75%)
- **Workaholics** are *responsible*, *logical*, and *organized*; they think first and do well with structure, rules, and regulations. Task-oriented and self-starting, they thrive with praise of their accomplishments and good ideas. (25 percent; mainly male, 75%)
- **Persisters** are *observant*, *conscientious*, and *dedicated*; they view the world through their beliefs and opinions. Preferring to do tasks alone or with one

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other person, they are achievement-oriented and need to have their convictions recognized. (Ten percent; mainly male, 75%)

- **Dreamers** are *imaginative*, *introspective*, and *calm*; they usually are passive and need time to reflect. They seldom initiate conversations, prefer guidelines and directions, and want time alone. (Ten percent; mainly female, 60%)
- **Rebels** are *spontaneous*, *creative*, and *playful*; they react with likes and dislikes to the world around them. They need fun, attention, and creative challenges. They prefer stimulating environments and fun people. (20 percent; mainly female, 60%)
- **Promoters** are *resourceful*, *adaptable*, and *charming*; they are action-oriented. They need immediate rewards and prefer exciting, stimulating activities, where they can lead. (Five percent; mainly male, 60%)

More than 500,000 people on four continents have been profiled using the Process Communication Model. The distribution among the various personality types for the general population, along with the results from previous research about educators (Gilbert, 1998) and the parent groups is arrayed in Table 1. It is noteworthy that educators and parents are more strongly nurturative (Reactor) and value-based (Persister) than the general population, but not as strongly logical and structured (Workaholic). Also of interest was the fact that no educator was found who primarily action-oriented.

Similarly, at-risk children are one of the last two types. This means that the preferences of teachers and parents are not shared by these youngsters. As a result, they may exhibit a lot of negative behavior– blaming other things or people, sabotaging activities, breaking or manipulating the rules, and trying to get others to misbehave. These behaviors are highly predictable and an attempt by those in distress to get their inherent needs met, even if negatively.

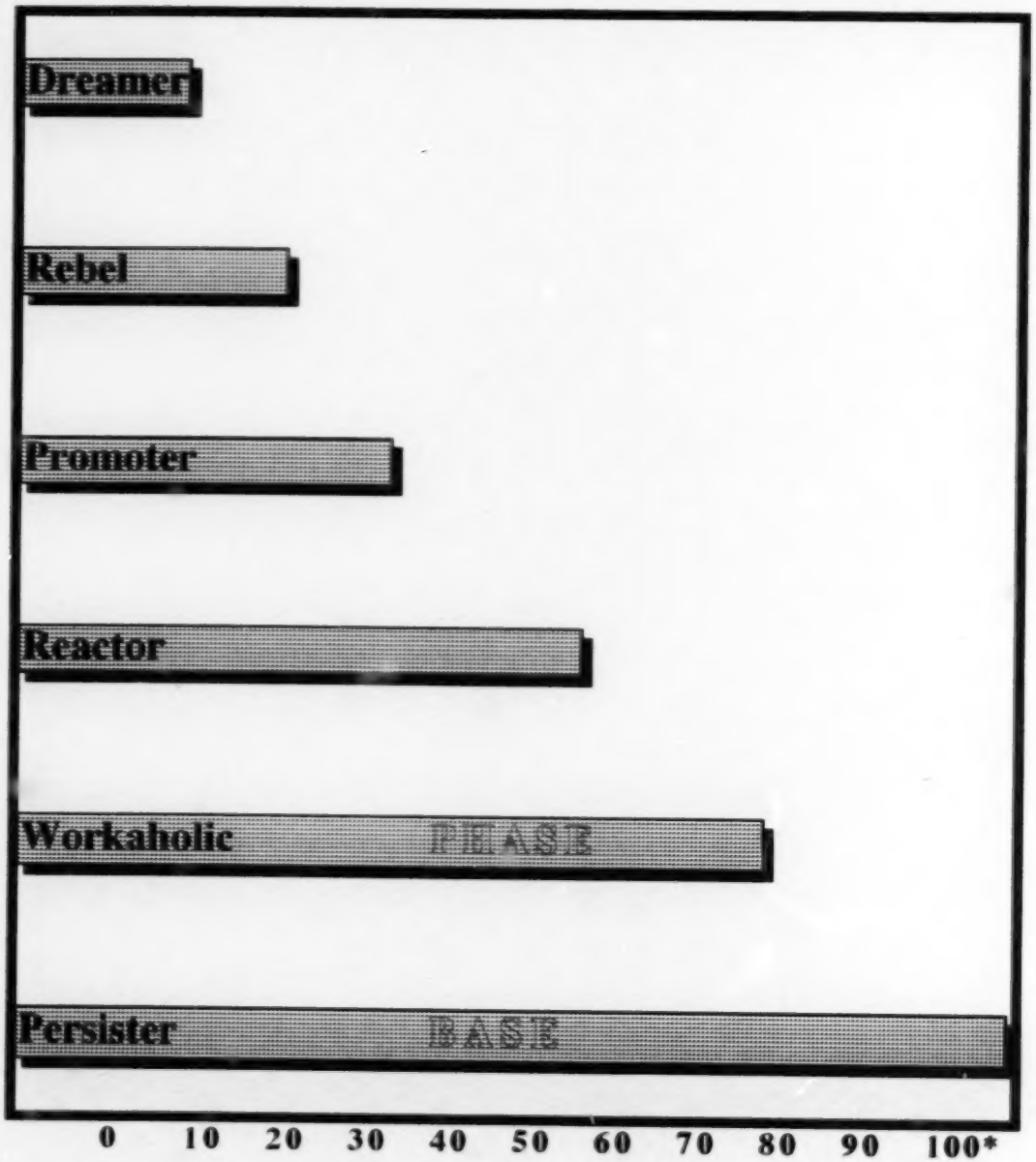
Table 1

Distribution of Personality Types

Personality Type	General Population	Educator Base	Parent Base
Reactor	30%	37%	35%
Workaholic	25%	11%	18%
Persister	10%	38%	16%
Dreamer	10%	5%	12%
Rebel	20%	9%	12%
Promoter	5%	–	6%

PCM suggests that each of us has a base personality where our strongest preferences for experiencing the world reside. Each of the remaining five personality types are stacked on top of that base to resemble a *condominium*. The order of the remaining "floors" is probably influenced by our early environment, and that order is set by age seven. In our condominium, we also have an elevator that allows us to travel from floor to floor as the situation invites. The unique aspect of the condominium analogy is that not all the floors are "furnished" equally. In fact, each higher floor is likely to be less well furnished than the ones beneath it. Figure 1 shows an example of one of the 720 different possible combinations.

Figure 1
Sample Personality Condominium



[* Refers to percentage of relative energy available on each floor]

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The individual represented here is described as a Persister (base) in a Workaholic Phase. This means that this person's strongest characteristics are being *dedicated, conscientious,* and *observant*. His (75% of Persisters are male) perceptual preferences are ***values***, ***beliefs***, and ***opinions***. He is currently living on his second floor and is predominantly motivated through his needs of ***recognition for work*** and ***time structure*** (those Workaholic attributes).

The concept of *phase* is unique to Process Communication. Two thirds of the population will experience a phase change at least once in their lives. Phases last from two years to a lifetime, and are occasioned (99% of the time) by long-term, intense distress with a particular life issue. The change occurs when that issue is resolved.

The distress one experiences is described simply as not getting one's needs met positively. The distress is shown in very predictable behaviors, which are the negative attempts to get the same needs met. These needs are the motivational factors each of us has.

Reactor	Acceptance of self; sensory satisfaction
Workaholic	Recognition for work; time structure
Persister	Recognition for work; conviction
Dreamer	Solitude
Rebel	Contact
Promoter	Incidence

Since Process Communication is based on Transactional Analysis, in distress someone is not OK– either me or you. Getting out of distress means that the not-OK person becomes OK because I have found a way to get my needs met positively– either to become OK myself, or to see you as OK.

For example, using the person described above, a Workaholic-phase individual needs recognition for work and time structure. If he does not get those needs met, he will

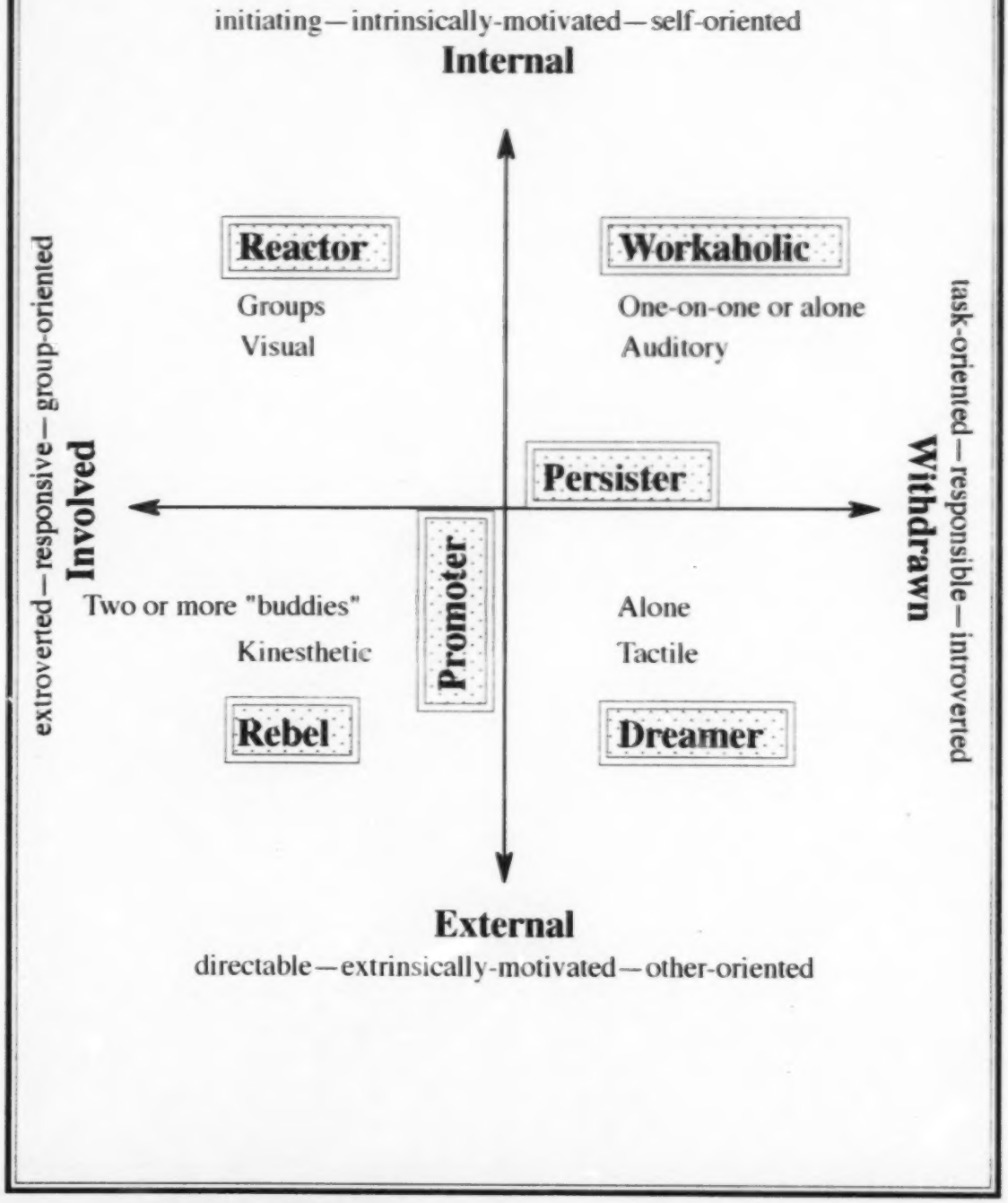
do some very predictable things. First, he will take on more and more work, because he thinks he can do it better, faster, and more efficiently than asking someone else to do it– "Don't bother. I'll do it myself!" If he is still not successful in achieving recognition for work and time structure, he will become picky about fairness, responsibility, money, or other related issues. So he is OK, but nobody else is.

The "classic" battle a Workaholic parent would experience would be with a Rebel child: "Why is your room so messy?" "How can you go out of the house dressed like that?" "Can't you be more responsible?"

For each "indictment," the child would respond with an excuse, be blameless, or seek to blame someone/something else: "Yes, but…" "It wasn't my fault." "See what you made me do!" The child will usually not win the "battle," but he might become vengeful or sabotaging. He will attempt to "get" the hypercritical parent. The end result is that no one wins. …But the problem is that the behaviors will likely continue– the parent continuing to try to instill responsibility and the child continuing to be playful (perceived to be irresponsible by the parent).

Parents predominate with either trying to nurture, instill responsibility in, or proyide a solid belief system for their children. Children who are the greatest challenge want playful contact or need to have a lot going on with quick payoffs. The matrix below shows that most parents are internally-motivated– Reactors, Workaholics, and Persisters– and the children who are the most difficulty for these parents are externally-motivated– Rebels and Promoters.

ASSESSING MATRIX



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Communicating with Rebels and Promoters is most effective when it involves kinesthetic input through either an *emotive* (playful) or *directive* (also good with Dreamers) channel. While the Reactor parent prefers a *nurturative* channel, and Workaholic and Persister parents prefer a *requestive* channel, each has the ability to move to where they can communicate most easily with their children. The key is getting their needs met first. When parents get what they need, communicating with children is easier. When needs are not met, parents invite (if not demand) that their children come to where they (the parents) are most comfortable. It is the rejection of this invitation that sets up the potential battle.

For parents to be more effective, they must recognize that what they are doing is not working and resolve to stop doing non-productive or counter-productive things (*a la* William Glasser). Rather they should find ways to keep themselves energized– get their needs met– and move to the areas ("floors") where their children prefer to communicate and get their needs met.

For parents to become more effective, they must be able to recognize the operative failure mechanisms people project– either themselves or their children. These mechanisms are listed below.

REACTOR	Makes Mistakes
WORKAHOLIC	Overcontrols
PERSISTER	Pushes Beliefs (Crusades)
DREAMER	Waits Passively
REBEL	Blames
PROMOTER	Manipulates

As parents see these behaviors, they can begin to intervene– by trying to get their own needs met, or by trying to assist their children. Table 2 some suggestions for each personality phase– for motivation.

Table 2

Phase Distress Behaviors and Productive Interventions

Phase	Distress Behaviors	Productive Interventions
REACTOR	• Lacks assertiveness and invites criticism .	• Focus on family; buy favorite fragrance
WORKAHOLIC	• Doesn't delegate well and overcontrols	• Complete one task at a time; don't overschedule
PERSISTER	• Identifies what's wrong, not what's right and pushes beliefs	• Reaffirm religious beliefs; serve community
DREAMER	• Spreads self too thin, and doesn't complete projects	• Find alone time/space.
REBEL	• Won't make the decisions and blames	• Find time and chums for fun and play
PROMOTER	• Doesn't support others; manipulates	• Bodily activities; quick outcome

Understanding children is a way for parenting to become easier and with fewer battles. However, Process Parenting is not a panacea, only a useful tool. Parents and their children will continue to try to get their needs met. If those needs are different, effective communication is one of the ways for peace in the family to happen.

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Process Parenting
Workshop Evaluation Composite, 1997

Mean Responses (maximum score= 10; number of respondents= 33)

Personal Significance of Program:	9.12
Professional Significance of Program:	9.15
Accuracy of Profile:	8.76
Competence of Trainer:	9.69

Sample of Comments

"I experienced more about myself and got to know my children's phases and relationship we should have...I really enjoyed myself...and got to know my phases."

"I believe this will enable me to work with my children in a more positive way. Thank you for inviting me to attend this seminar."

"This program was informative, but I need more information on the subject."

"It was interesting."

"I've experienced things that I didn't realize that I was doing to my child so this helped me a lot. This is a very good program and I would suggest it to other parents. I wish I can get my husband to attend this class."

"Gave me different ideas to work with my daughter more."

"I enjoyed it. I feel like I learned more about my children."

"I learn(ed) how to deal better with all my children, not just one...The program was very good. I enjoyed it."

"This was very good for me and I would recommend it for all parents."

"Very good. Informative. Helpful...Please get the teachers involved in this training."

"Learn(ed) a great deal...Thank you for the excellent information."

"It will teach me how to become a better parent. It was a warm and exciting group. I felt very comfortable in taking part in this group."

"...really enjoyed it...explained a lot of things."

"I've had a great experience in learning more about me and my family. Also a different outlook on how we should and can deal with each other...I feel every school, teacher and student in the district should be inserviced or, so to speak, train on the program. It's excellent."

"Very good overall."

"Thank you very much. I need(ed) this training; the training really help(ed) me to see myself."

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